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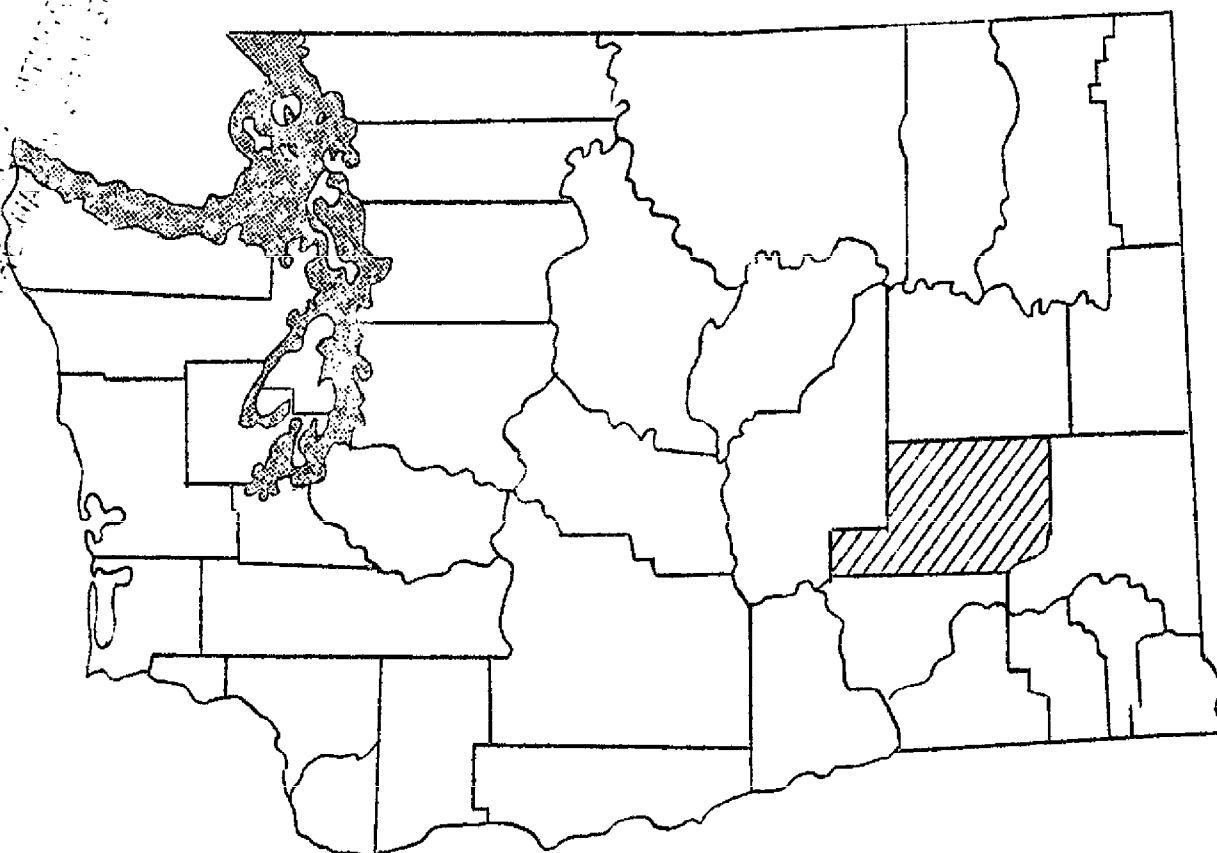
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ADAMS COUNTY AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES
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Seattle, Washington 98104

FOREWORD

This bulletin on Adams County is one of a second edition series devoted to presenting the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. The original series was initiated in 1956 by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. State funds were matched by moneys from the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals, especially in the field of marketing agricultural products. Knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Adams County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by social studies teachers. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area.

Selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an overall appreciation of Adams County. Enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Adams County. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forest which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgement is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Field Operations Division, Statistical Reporting Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Research involved in up-dating and revising the original information and the preparation of the manuscript of the second edition of the Adams County bulletin were performed by Howard W. Chadwick, Research Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Editing of the first draft of the present bulletin was done by Emery C. Wilcox. Agricultural Statisticians of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service gave valuable assistance. Marion L. Ware, Washington State Department of Agriculture, typed all of the textual and tabular material and prepared the graphs. The bulletins were reproduced and assembled by the members of the clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service.

Olympia, Washington
April 1, 1966

Donald W. Moos, Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture

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PART I

HISTORY OF ADAMS COUNTY AGRICULTURE

Introduction

Adams County, a land of large dryland grain fields and irrigated cropland, is located in southeastern Washington. Larger than the state of Rhode Island, the county's land area of 1,212,800 acres places it sixteenth in size among Washington's 39 counties. Over three-fourths of the land is suitable for cultivation. Dryland wheat and other small grain farming is carried on in the eastern part of the county under a summer fallow system designed to make the most of scanty rainfall. In the western part of the county dry beans and peas, potatoes, field corn and sugar beets have become important recently following the development of irrigation under the Columbia Basin Project.

Although Adams County is only 24th statewide in number of farms, the value of all products sold from farms placed Adams fourth in 1959. For years, Adams has been among the state's 10 leading grain counties and in 1959 it was first in spring wheat and rye acreage and third in winter wheat and barley acreage. The Census of Agriculture that year showed Adams as fourth among all United States counties in wheat production and 32nd for barley production.

Although wheat is the major crop by a wide margin, irrigated field crops have become important to the county's agriculture. Adams in 1959 ranked second statewide on an acreage basis in dry beans, third in potatoes, fifth in field corn and dry peas, and sixth for sugar beets.

History

Early exploration of the area now in Adams county was mainly by French-Canadian fur trappers operating out of trading centers such as Forts Okanogan and Spokane. They named the hilly grassland of the Palouse River Valley "La Pelouse", meaning "the grass land". An important pioneer trail called the Hullan Road passed through present Adams County to connect Forts Walla Walla and Spokane. Indian bands of the Cayuse, Snake, Walla Walla, Nez Perce, and Yakima roamed the area grazing their horses and camping at springs and ponds along Lind Coulee, Cow Creek and the Palouse River.

Indian attitude toward white men and disputes with Great Britain prevented agricultural settlement until the late 1860's. Indians resisted white settlement and open hostility developed with the 1847 Whitman Massacre in the Walla Walla Valley. The hostility culminated in the Cayuse Indian War, a wide spread conflict between the U.S. Army and the 14 tribes in the Yakima Confederation led by the Yakimas. Governor Issac Stevens of Washington Territory concluded a treaty with the Indians in

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Table 1. Adams County's Rank Compared With Other Washington Counties

Item Compared	Rank	Quantity
<u>General</u>		
Land area.....	16	1,212,800 acres
Number of farms.....	24	786 farms
Land in farms--percent.....	5	88.8 percent
Average size of farms.....	2	1,370.2 acres
Cropland harvested.....	3	399,033 acres
Irrigated land in farms.....	6	48,280 acres
Rural farm population ^{1/}	22	2,805 persons
Total county population ^{1/}	31	9,929 persons
<u>Cash farm income</u>		
Value of all farm products sold ^{2/} ...	4	24,602,832 dollars
Value of livestock sold ^{2/}	19	3,547,300 dollars
Value of crops sold ^{2/}	4	21,055,532 dollars
<u>Livestock on farms</u>		
All cattle and calves.....	16	29,466 head
Milk cows.....	33	509 head
Hogs.....	8	6,509 head
Chickens.....	30	17,433 head
Horses and mules.....	27	490 head
Sheep and lambs.....	16	5,082 head
<u>Dairy and poultry products sold</u>		
Value of dairy products sold.....	35	67,325 dollars
Whole milk sold.....	35	1,570,743 pounds
Value of poultry products sold.....	33	34,199 dollars
Chickens sold.....	31	7,265 birds
Eggs Sold.....	33	87,343 dozen
<u>Important crops harvested</u>		
Winter wheat.....	3	192,435 acres
Barley.....	3	77,702 acres
Spring wheat.....	1	61,062 acres
Rye.....	1	28,625 acres
Dry beans.....	2	13,025 acres
Hay crops.....	24	12,042 acres
Oats.....	12	3,940 acres
Field corn.....	5	3,542 acres
Potatoes.....	3	2,964 acres
Dry peas.....	5	2,371 acres
Sugar beets.....	6	1,236 acres

^{1/} From 1960 Census of Population. ^{2/} Based on reports from a sample of farms.

Source: 1959 Census of Agriculture.

1855 at Walla Walla, but sporadic fighting continued for several years. A calvary detachment under Colonel Edward J. Steptoe was defeated at Rosalia in 1858. The army eventually won, however, and by 1870 the Nez Perce, last of the hostile Indian Nations, had accepted peace. Most of the Indians agreed to move to the Yakima, Colville, Spokane and Umatilla Reservations.

At the same time as the Indian trouble there was a boundary dispute with Great Britain over territory north of the Columbia River. Britain claimed the area because

Table 2. Adams County's Agricultural Rank Among the One Hundred Leading United States Counties.

Commodity	Rank	
	1959	1954
All wheat (acreage)	11	6
All wheat (production)	4	4
Barley (acreage)	39	47
Barley (production)	32	39
Potatoes (acreage)	70	1/
Potatoes (production)	62	1/

1/ Not among the first 100 counties.

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1959.

of her fur trading activities around Puget Sound and along the Columbia. American settlement was discouraged by the British until the present boundary along Latitude 49° North was established by the Treaty of 1846. Oregon Territory, including the present state of Washington, was created in 1848. Washington Territory was formed three years later. Territorial boundaries were changed to the present state lines in 1863 by the creation of Idaho Territory. Statehood for Washington came in 1889.

Settlement of boundary and Indian disputes opened central Washington to agricultural settlement. The first recorded settler in present Adams County was George Lucas, who established a ranch in Cow Creek Valley in the late 1860's. The ranch was stocked with cattle moved in from the Walla Walla Valley. Lucas was followed by other cattlemen from the Walla Walla area: William Lambre, Thomas Durry, J.F. Coss, Malcolm Reed, James Kennedy, Robert Green, Delbert Hooper, and Philip Ritz (for whom Ritzville was named). These early stockmen favored the free public domain grass range of eastern Adams County where rainfall was sufficient to grow native grass on the rich wind-deposited soils. Later farmers were to find these soils more profitable for wheat and other grains.

Adams County was created by Act of the Washington Territorial Legislature on November 28, 1883. It was organized from the northwestern part of older Whitman County and named in honor of President John Adams. Ritzville, destined to become a railroad shipping and trade center of a rich wheat farming region, was established as county seat.

As in other areas of the west, the Donation Land Law of 1850-1855 and the Homestead Act of 1862 helped open up the interior of Washington to farmers. Starting about 1880, the open range livestock period began to end with the arrival of homesteaders interested in growing commercial wheat. Completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad through Ritzville and Lind to Puget Sound attracted farmers and speculators who arrived to file claim on government land and to buy railway grant lands. There was active speculation in wheat land and in town sites along the new railroad. Land value increased from \$0.50 per acre in 1880 to over \$7.00 by 1900.

The period from 1890 to 1910 was one of expansion. The county's population increased from about 2,000 to an all-time high of nearly 11,000. Experienced wheat and grain farmers moved in from the central plains states and from the wheat lands

of southern Russia and central Europe. One group led by J.M. Harris and Al and Will York came to the Ritzville area from Canton, South Dakota. Russian immigrants of German ancestry, prominent among whom were Alexander F. Rosenoff, Jacob Rosenoff, and Sebastian Ott, came to the Ritzville area in large numbers. Ritzville had four German-speaking churches in 1900.

The combination of fertile soil and railway facilities made commercial wheat growing a highly successful pioneer activity. A 1910 report states that Ritzville was then the largest rail shipment point in the state for wheat. Warehouses at Ritzville that year received over 1,967,000 bushels of sacked wheat from surrounding farms for shipment to domestic and foreign markets.

Eastern Washington's wheat-based prosperity began to decline in the late 1920's as a result of low prices and world-wide surpluses which destroyed foreign markets. Wheat sales in Adams county dropped from about \$4,000,000 (\$1.00 a bushel) in 1929 to \$3,256,000 (\$0.88 a bushel) in 1934. Depression and drought in the 1930's caused abandonment of many small farms and the sale and consolidation of other farms to form larger units. Many uprooted people left the county for urban areas. Population in the county dropped to 6,209 by 1940.

The Columbia Basin Project, providing irrigation water from Grand Coulee Dam, caused an upsurge in Adams County's agriculture beginning in the early 1950's. The project was authorized in 1943 by Act of Congress to be developed by the Bureau of Reclamation, United States Department of the Interior. Land area in the project amounts to about 2,500,000 acres, of which nearly half is suitable for irrigation. Nearly 400,000 acres were under irrigation by 1964 in Franklin, Adams, and Grant counties. Adams County's portion of the total developed irrigation land in the Project's East District involves about 50,000 acres.

Irrigation created a shift in agricultural emphasis on Project lands from grain to field crops, although wheat remains most important in the rest of the county. Another change has been the trend toward more and smaller farms in irrigated areas. Prior to irrigation development, many owners of dryland farms within the Project signed anti-speculation agreements and released land for government purchase. The land was then resold in family-sized units at controlled prices to qualified applicants selected by public drawings. Priority for tract purchase was given to military service veterans. The influx of new farm families into the area caused a population growth from 6,584 inhabitants in 1950 to 9,929 in 1960.

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